

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SCS-06 CA-01 L-03 PC-01 AID-05

HA-05 SP-02 SS-15 NSC-05 H-01 CIAE-00 INR-10

NSAE-00 /065 W

-----013030 301430Z /46

R 301330Z MAY 78

FM AMEMBASSY COTONOU

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 777

C O N F I D E N T I A L COTONOU 787

FROM CHARGE

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, DM, US

SUBJ: HARROP VISIT: PEACE CORPS AND JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

REF: COTONOU 782

1. DURING MAY 26 MEETING WITH ACTING MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS ATCHADE (REFTEL), DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY HARROP RAISED ISSUES OF (A) THE PEACE CORPS AND (B) STATUS OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES NEGOTIATIONS. CONCERNING THE P.C. PROGRAM IN BENIN HARROP SAID THAT THE U.S. WAS OF THE IMPRESSION THAT THE VOLUNTEERS HAD WORKED VERY EFFECTIVELY AND HAD BEEN WELL RECEIVED BY BENINESE IN THE VILLAGES TO WHICH THEY HAD BEEN ASSIGNED. HARROP NOTED, HOWEVER, THAT OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS THE NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS IN BENIN HAS DROPPED THROUGH ATTRITION AND NOW CONSISTS OF 20 VOLS SERVING AS TEACHERS OF ENGLISH, HEALTH, AND A FEW VOLUNTEERS DOING MORE SPECIALIZED WORK. BY THE TNE OF THE SUMMER ALL BUT A FEW OF THESE VOLUNTEERS WILL HAVE COMPLETED THEIR TOURS OF SERVICE AND THE P.C. PROGRAM IN BENIN WILL FIND ITSELF SERIOUSLY DEPLETED. THE DEPUTY ASST SEC SAID THAT THE U.S. GOVERNMENT IS VERY INTERESTED IN CONTINUING THE P.C. PROGRAM BUT NOTED THAT TO DO SO IT MUST HAVE A REQUEST FROM THE BENINESE GOVERNMENT FOR A SPECIFIC NUMBER OF VOLS IN A DESIGNATED FIELD OF ACTIVITY.

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HE REMINDED THE MINISTER THAT THE P.C. DIRECTOR IN BENIN HAS MET WITH THE APPROPRIATE AUTHORITIES BUT THAT NO REQUEST HAS BEEN FORTHCOMING. IF THE P.C. IS TO CONTINUE IN BENIN, HARROP SAID, A REQUEST WILL HAVE TO BE MADE BY THE GPRB.

2. ACTING FORMIN ATCHADE EXPRESSED THE GPRB'S APPRECIATION FOR THE WORK OF THE P.C. IN BENIN AND SAID THAT THE REASON THE

REQUEST HAS BEEN DELAYED WAS THAT THE GPRB WISHES TO INTEGRATE VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES INTO THE THREE-YEAR STATE PLAN. AS OF THE PRESENT TIME THE GOV'T IS STILL REVIEWING THE PLAN TO FIND WAYS OF INTEGRATING NEW VOLUNTEERS IN AREAS CORRESPONDING TO THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMIC PRIORITIES. ATACHDE SAID THAT THIS REVIEW SHOULD BE COMPLETED SOON AND THAT A REQUEST FOR ADDITIONAL VOLS WILL BE FORTHCOMING.

3. DEP ASST SEC HARROP THEN TURNED TO COMPENSATION FOR THE JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES. HE TOLD THE ACTING FORMIN THAT THE U.S. WAS ANXIOUS TO EXPEDITE SETTLEMENT NEGOTIATIONS IN ORDER TO SETTLE AN ISSUE WHICH HAS BEEN OUTSTANDING SINCE 1976. HE SAID HE UNDERSTOOD THAT THE WITNESSES WERE AWAITING GPRB CONFIRMATION THAT THE WITNESSES' NEGOTIATOR, CARLOW PROSSER, WHO WAS AMONG THE WITNESSES ORIGINALLY EXPELLED IN 1976, WOULD BE ALLOWED TO ENTER AND LEAVE BENIN WITHOUT FEAR OF ARREST OR DETENTION.

4. IN REPLY ATCHADE MADE A SHORT SPEECH ON THE GOALS OF THE REVOLUTION, STRESSING THAT THE GPRB ENCOURAGED THE INDIVIDUAL'S FREEDOM TO PRACTICE OR NOT PRACTICE A RELIGION. HE SAID THAT HE HIMSELF HAD BEEN A PROTESTANT, DIRGEN ADJIN A CATHOLIC, AND THAT THERE WERE MANY MUSLIMS FREELY PRACTICING THEIR RELIGION IN BENIN. THE JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES, HOWEVER, HAD REFUSED TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE LEGITIMACY OF THE REVOLUTIONARY GOVERNMENT, WOULD NOT RECITE REVOLUTIONARY SLOGANS AND DID NOT RESPECT THE BENINESE FLAG. AFTER MANY WARNINGS, AND FOLLOWING THEIR REFUSAL TO COMPLY WITH CONFIDENTIAL

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BASIC REQUIREMENTS OF THE REVOLUTION THEY WERE EXPELLED. ATCHADE SAID HE WAS NOT "AU COURANT" ON THE STATUS OF THE EMBASSY'S REQUEST FOR SAFE-CONDUCT FOR MR. PROSSER, BUT HE INSTRUCTED THE INTERIOR MINISTRY REPRESENTATIVE PRESENT AT THE MEETING TO CHECK INTO THE MATTER. THE ACTING MINISTER STATED THAT BENIN WAS ALSO ANXIOUS TO COMPLETE COMPENSATION NEGOTIATIONS AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

5. HARROP THANKED THE MINISTER AND SAID HE WAS PLEASED TO HEAR HIM SAY THAT THE REVOLUTION ATTACHED GREAT IMPORTANCE TO INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM OF RELIGION. THE DEPUTY ASST SEC SAID THAT THE U.S. PARTICULARLY VALUES THE FREEDOM OF THE INDIVIDUAL. HE NOTED THAT WITHIN THE HUMAN RIGHTS CONTEXT, INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM HAD BEEN A MAJOR FOCUS OF ATTENTION OF THE USG. HARROP EXPRESSED HIS THANKS TO THE MINISTER FOR RECEIVING HIM AND ADDED HIS REGRET AT NOT BEING ABLE TO SEE THE PROGRESS OF THE REVOLUTION IN OTHER PARTS OF BENIN. HE SAID HE FELT THAT SUCH VISITS WERE IMPORTANT SINCE IT WAS IN THE COMMON INTEREST OF BENIN AND THE U.S. FOR EACH TO UNDERSTAND THE OTHER.

6. IN RESPONSE, MIN ATCHADE SAID HE HOPED IT WOULD NOT BE THE LAST VISIT OF THE DEP ASST SEC WHOM HE ASKED TO BE "BENIN'S

AMBASSADOR TO THE U.S." IN EXPLAINING WHAT IS TAKING PLACE IN THE COUNTRY. HE SAID THAT BENIN WANTS TO TREAT WITH ALL COUNTRIES ON AN EQUAL FOOTING AND THAT THE SIZE OF A COUNTRY SHOULD NOT AFFECT THE RESPECT A COUNTRY RECEIVES. ATCHADE SAID THAT BENIN IS "AGAINST NO ONE." ITS AIM IS TO DEVELOP A BETTER SOCIETY FOR ITS PEOPLE AND IT HAS CHOSEN THE SOCIALIST OPTION IN ORDER TO DO THIS. THE MINISTER SAID THAT BENIN WELCOMED AMERICAN VISITORS AND WANTED TO BE ABLE TO SHOW A WELL-FUNCTIONING REVOLUTIONARY SOCIETY. IT WAS FOR THIS REASON THAT GPRB WISHES TO CLEAR UP THE BENNETT AFFAIR TO THAT OTHERS CAN HAVE CONFIDENCE IN BENIN.

7. COMMENT: BELIEVE VISIT OF DEP ASST SEC HARROP WAS VERY USEFUL FROM POINT OF VIEW OF FOCUSING GPRB'S ATTENTION ON BENNETT CASE AND AS A SIGNAL TO BENINESE THAT WE ENCOURAGE A DIALOGUE
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BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES. (BENIN TENDS TO FEEL THAT ANY ACTION TAKEN AGAINST IT IS A RESULT OF ITS ADOPTION OF "SCIENTIFIC SOCIALISM RATHER THAN AS RESULT OF OBJECTIVE ANALYSIS OF SITUATION). GIVEN BENINESE NOTORIOUS INABILITY TO ORGANIZE THEMSELVES IN NORMAL CIRCUMSTANCES, THE FACT THAT HARROP'S APPOINTMENTS WERE ARRANGED ON SHORT NOTICE AMIDST TWO STATE VISITS IMPLIES CLEAR SIGN OF IMPORTANCE BENINESE ATTACHED TO XDEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY'S VISIT. DIRGEN OF FORMIN PERSONALLY CAME TO PORTO-NOVO TO ESCORT DEPUTY ASST SEC HARROP TO COTONOU AND MIN ATCHADE ORGANIZED A SPECIAL LUNCHEON FOR HARROP AND THOSE SENIOR OFFICIALS NOT OUT OF TOWN WITH GUINEAN PRESIDENT SEKOU TOURE (WHO WAS VISITING THE OLD ROYAL CAPITAL OF ABOMEY). SURPRISINGLY ENOUGH, BENINESE DID NOT RAISE QUESTION OF APPOINTMENT OF AN AMBASSADOR OR ADDITIONAL AID BUT SEEMED TO WANT TO SHOW THEMSELVES AS REASONABLE PEOPLE WITH WHOM TO DEAL. THOMPSON

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLICIES, VISITS, PROGRAMS (PROJECTS)
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 30 may 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978COTON000787
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780225-1253
Format: TEL
From: COTONOU
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t1978059/aaaaagzf.tel
Line Count: 151
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 0fcecba3-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 COTONOU 782
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 19 apr 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2780957
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: HARROP VISIT: PEACE CORPS AND JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES
TAGS: PFOR, DM, US, PC, JEHOVAHS WITNESS, (HARROP, WILLIAM C)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/0fcecba3-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014